DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 090 267 TM 003 542

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TITLE A State-Wide Assessment of Student Opinions About Their School.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Convention of the National Council on Measurement in Education (Chicago, Illinois, April, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Tests; *Educational Assessment; Grade 8; Participant Satisfaction; Questionnaires; *School Attitudes; State Programs; *State Surveys; *Student Attitudes; Student Opinion; Student School Relationship; Surveys
IDENTIFIERS Florida Statewide Assessment Program; SOAP; Student Opinion and Attitude Poll

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the procedures used, and the results of, a state-wide assessment of eighth-grade pupils' opinions toward their schools. A Student Opinion and Attitude Poll was installed as a regular component of the Florida State-Wide Eighth-Grade Testing Program. Results deal with student attitudes and opinions about strictness and adequacy of rules, participation in decision-making, amount of freedom they perceive, frequency and seriousness of certain problems, feelings about different teaching methods, and perceived adequacy of the instruction on current problems. In addition to providing information on how Florida students view their schools, the report should be of general interest as an extensive implementation of affective measurement in a state testing program. (Author)

ED 090267

TM 003542

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A State-Wide Assessment of Students Opinions About Their Schools

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The purpose of this paper is to describe the development, administration and results of an instrument for assessing the opinions of Florida public and private eighth-grade students about their schools.

Typically, schools have been conceived, built, staffed, and operated, with little input from their clients, the pupils, who spend a large portion of their developmental years in the school environment. In 1973, a Student Opinion and Attitude Poll (SOAP) was installed as a regular component of the Florida State-Wide Eighth-Grade Testing Program. SOAP provides students with the opportunity to express opinions about their school, to evaluate and offer suggestions concerning some aspects of the school that directly effect them, and to indicate what action they would take in certain situations.

The results from SOAP provide information to the school that can be helpful in: (a) obtaining an overall picture of how the students view the school (b) measuring student attitudes toward particular aspects of the school and (c) obtaining feedback that might provide the basis for constructive changes in certain policies, practices, and programs.

Development

The 115 item multiple choice instrument was constructed by the Florida Eighth-Grade staff after extensive study of the technical and political problems in affective measurement in school settings. The instrument was designed to maximize the utility of the results for school personnel and to eliminate objectionable features such as "invasion of privacy", which often accompany non-cognitive testing. In order to achieve these goals, the following guidelines were adopted prior to the writing of individual items.

1. Items are to be phrased so that the responses would have maximum utility for school personnel.
2. The item format should be simple and have a readability level low enough, so that almost all eighth-graders would be able to read and understand what is being asked.
3. The number of items should be limited so that the instrument could conveniently be included in the test battery.
4. Items which deal too specifically with individual administrators and individual teachers are not to be included in the instrument, since it is not the intent of SOAP to evaluate these individuals.
5. No items are to be included which might be construed to be an invasion of the student's privacy.

These guidelines were strictly adhered to throughout the project and, in retrospect, it is felt that their violation would have had serious consequences for the program.

The instrument specifications evolved through the following stages. First, an exhaustive list of aspects, or dimensions, of the school environment was prepared. This list was created by the program staff after reviewing the professional literature and after discussing the instrument with school personnel at many levels. The literature search included a survey of two instruments used at the secondary level: the Pennsylvania Student Questionnaire and Questa from Educational Testing Service (1971).

After careful evaluation of the dimensions selected, an initial item pool was developed. Drafts of items and of complete instruments were circulated to appropriate state educational personnel, and their comments and suggestions were useful in refining the items. A content by process classification matrix evolved during the construction process and influenced the final development of the instrument. Preliminary forms were administered on several occasions to eighth-graders locally. On each of these occasions, student and teacher feedback was obtained and used in adding, revision and deleting items. The instrument was then administered as part of the complete battery on a trial basis in representative schools throughout the state. The final revision was made on the basis of data from this administration.

Content by Process Classification

The Content by Process Classification Matrix for SOAP is shown in Table 1, with the item numbers included within each cell. The content categories, shown in the leftmost column of Table 1, consist of the different aspects of the school environment assessed by the instrument.

The process categories constitute the column headings of Table 1 and identify the type of response elicited by the item. The following process categories are used:

1. Description - What I Think Is
2. Evaluation - How Well Is It Functioning
3. Suggestion - What I Should Be
4. Action - What I Would Do

A brief description of each process category follows.

Description. The student is asked to choose the alternative which he thinks best describes the situation with which the item is concerned.

Evaluation. The student is asked to evaluate different aspects of the school environment. Some of the items in this category were designed to be similar to those in the description category so that comparisons could be made between students' descriptions and evaluations.

Suggestion. The student is given the opportunity to offer specific suggestions concerning certain present and future school policies.

TABLE 1

Content by Process Classification Matrix for SOAP

Content \ Process	Description	Evaluation	Suggestion	Action	Total
School Rules:					
General	4,5	1	3		
Enforcement		2			11
Personal Appearance	6		9		
Behavior	7,8		10,11		
Discipline:					
Amount		12,13			4
Administrated by	14		15		
Freedom:					
Personal Appearance		16,17			
Choice of Subjects		18			7
Behavior		19,20,21			
General			22		
School Spirit:					
Student Rapport	24	23,25,26,27,28			
School Clubs	29,32		31	30	14
School Pride	33			34	
Miscellaneous			39	35	
School Problems:					
Student Learning	37		38		
General	36			40,41	9
Cheating		42			
Stealing		43			
Drugs		44,45			
Guidance Program:					
Personnel	46				
Procedures	47,48,50	49			8
Activities	51,52				
Overall Effect		53			
School Subjects:					
General		55,56,61		54	8
Types of Activities	57,59		58,60		
Resources:					
Textbooks	62,63				10
Materials	65,70	64			
Library	66,68,69	67,71			
Teaching Methods:					
Lecture	72	73,74,75			
Individualized	76	77,78,79			16
Group Discussion	80	81,82,83			
Laboratories	84	85,86,87			
Life Problems:		88,89,90,91,92			
Class time spent		93,94,95			8
School Bathrooms:					
Appearance & Equip.		96,97,98			6
Adequacy & Avail.		99,100,101			
Classrooms:					
Appearance		102,103,105			4
Adequacy		104			
Lunchroom:					
Appearance		106,107			10
Adequacy	110,111	108,109			
Food		112	114	113,115	
TOTAL	33	62	12	8	115

Action. The student is asked to indicate how he would participate in various aspects of the school if given the opportunity, and what action he would take if confronted with some problem.

The SOAP Reports

Each school received a report listing the percentage of students in that school, in the county in which the school is located, and in the state, that responded to each alternative for each item in SOAP. County and state-wide distributions were reported in order to provide the bases for broader comparisons and for other analyses of the data that the school might wish to conduct. A sample page of the SOAP report is shown in Table 2. Some of the items and responses were shortened over the originals in the test booklet for convenient inclusion into the computer generated SOAP report.

In addition to the results, each school received a manual to assist in the interpretation of the results. The manual described some techniques which could be employed to facilitate understanding and use of the large amount of data provided by SOAP. Specific questions that could be answered by the data were suggested. The school official for whom the questions seemed most appropriate and a list of the items that might help provide answers to the questions were included.

No summary statistics or scores were reported. Item results seem to be more appropriate because of their direct

TABLE 2

Example of SOAP Report

034 WOULD YOU HELP WORK ON SCHOOL GROUNDS TO KEEP THEM LOOKING NICE AND CLEAN	SC	CY	ST
F YES	81	63	55
G NO	13	29	31
		1	2
	1		1
	1		1

035 WOULD YOU QUIT SCHOOL TODAY IF YOU COULD WITHOUT GETTING INTO TROUBLE	SC	CY	ST
A YES	11	12	13
B NO	78	80	74
	2	1	2
	2	1	1
	1		1

036 WHICH SCHOOL-VACATION SCHEDULE WOULD YOU LIKE BEST	SC	CY	ST
F 9-3 SAME FOR ALL STUDENTS	52	61	49
G 9-3 (QUARTER SYSTEM)	12	8	10
H 10-2 WITH EARLY GRADUATION	14	10	11
J 45 DAYS-15 DAYS (QUINMESTER)	11	12	12
	3	3	4

037 WHEN A STUDENT DOES NOT LEARN, WHO DO YOU THINK IS MOSTLY AT FAULT	SC	CY	ST
A PRINCIPAL	3	2	3
B TEACHERS	17	18	17
C PARENTS	7	6	6
D STUDENT, HIMSELF	63	64	60
E THE OTHER STUDENTS	3	3	3

038 THE TROUBLESOME STUDENT WHO KEEPS OTHERS FROM WORK SHOULD BE	SC	CY	ST
F SUSPENDED FOR A FEW DAYS.	7	10	9
G KEPT AFTER SCHOOL.	17	12	10
H IGNORED.	4	10	13
J COUNSELED TO DETERMINE PROBLEM	30	33	32
K PUT IN MORE INTERESTING CLASS.	37	29	27

039 WHICH IS THE ONE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM IN YOUR SCHOOL	SC	CY	ST
A USE OF DRUGS	11	21	16
B STEALING	22	25	29
C RACIAL PROBLEMS	14	30	24
D PERSONAL SAFETY	10	9	9
E ALCOHOL	1	1	1

040 TO WHOM WOULD YOU GO FIRST WITH A VERY SERIOUS PROBLEM IN YOUR SCHOOL	SC	CY	ST
F PRINCIPAL	11	17	11
G GUIDANCE COUNSELOR	37	35	42
H TEACHER	23	14	13
J PARENT OR RELATIVE	11	18	17
K ELECTED GROUP OF STUDENTS	9	6	8

041 WITH WHICH ADULT WOULD YOU FEEL MOST COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING A PERSONAL PROB	SC	CY	ST
A PRINCIPAL	4	5	4
B GUIDANCE COUNSELOR	14	12	19
C TEACHER	17	8	8
D PARENT OR RELATIVE	34	40	35
E NOT COMFORTABLE WITH ANY ADULT	23	27	24

042 HOW MUCH CHEATING GOES ON AT YOUR SCHOOL	SC	CY	ST
F A LOT	10	35	39
G SOME	44	42	35
H VERY LITTLE	32	13	12
J NONE AT ALL	6	3	3
			1

043 HOW MUCH STEALING GOES ON AT YOUR SCHOOL	SC	CY	ST
A A LOT	17	35	35
B SOME	29	41	34
C VERY LITTLE	41	15	17
D NONE AT ALL	6	3	4
	1		1

044 HOW EASY DO YOU THINK IT WOULD BE FOR STUDENTS TO GET DRUGS AT YOUR SCHOOL	SC	CY	ST
F VERY EASY	19	37	29
G NOT TOO EASY	22	19	18
H VERY DIFFICULT	21	6	10
J I DO NOT KNOW	34	28	32
	1	1	1

045 ABOUT HOW MANY STUDENTS DO YOU THINK USE DRUGS AT YOUR SCHOOL	SC	CY	ST
A MOST OF THEM	11	16	11
B SOME OF THEM	17	34	26
C JUST A FEW	28	18	20
D NONE	6	3	5
E I DO NOT KNOW	29	22	27

046 DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR IS	SC	CY	ST
F YES	84	73	73
G NO	10	21	15
	2	1	2
			1

047 DO YOU KNOW WHERE TO FIND YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELORS OFFICE IN SCHOOL	SC	CY	ST
A YES	77	78	76
B NO	14	16	12
	3	1	1
	1	1	1
	1		

048 DO YOU KNOW HOW TO GO ABOUT SEEING YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR	SC	CY	ST
F YES	81	69	69
G NO	14	25	19
		1	2
	1	1	1

049 HOW EASY IS IT TO GET TO SEE YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR	SC	CY	ST
A VERY EASY	60	42	40
B NOT VERY EASY	16	22	23
C VERY DIFFICULT	4	4	7
D I DO NOT KNOW	15	26	20
	1	1	1

050 HOW OFTEN CAN YOU SEE YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR	SC	CY	ST
F ANYTIME I AM AT SCHOOL	62	47	38
G ONLY WHEN HE SENDS FOR ME	9	6	16
H HE IS USUALLY TOO BUSY TO SEE	4	7	7
J I DO NOT KNOW	18	34	28
			1

051 IN WHICH OF THESE MATTERS DO YOU FEEL GUIDANCE COUNSELOR COULD HELP	SC	CY	ST
A SCHOOL MATTERS ONLY	28	35	28
B PERSONAL MATTERS ONLY	8	3	5
C BOTH OF THEM	48	45	46
D NEITHER OF THEM	11	10	9
		1	1

utility to the schools. Summary statistics and scores involve a synthesis of information, and thereby a potential loss of valuable detail. For example, a single score on a scale such as "student satisfaction" provides only very general information, and may conceal the fact that students are very satisfied with the amount of freedom they have, and very dissatisfied with the amount of learning they are experiencing. On the other hand, item results enable the school to determine exactly how the students responded to each alternative. Furthermore, if the school deems it informative to do such, item results make it possible for the school to devise its own summary statistics.

Administration

The SOAP was administered as a part of the Florida State-Wide Eighth-Grade Testing Program battery. This program is offered, at no cost, to all public and private schools in the state. It was anticipated that the announcement that such an instrument would be included in the program would cause some excitement, and it did. However, several steps had been taken to prevent an unwarranted scuttling of the SOAP program. State education personnel were kept informed of the plans for the instrument and of progress in its development. All district superintendents were mailed a next-to-last draft of the instrument. As a result, only one district and a few individual schools elected to omit the SOAP portion of the testing program. The instrument was administered to

about 120,000 eighth-grades (86% of total eighth-grade enrollment) in 351 of 366 public, 120 of 120 Catholic, and 69 of 91 private schools that registered for the testing program.

Results

Space does not permit a complete listing of results in this paper. Selected results which may be of interest to the educational community are summarized below in Tables 3-13. The numbers included in the tables indicate the percentage of students in the state choosing that particular alternative. Approximately 90% of the students who took the eighth-grade tests responded to each item in SOAP. The remaining 10% are accounted for by individual students who decided to omit that item or by schools who omitted SOAP from their testing.

Instruction

The data indicated a slight preference for individualized work, group discussions and laboratory experiences over traditional lecture techniques (not shown). Topics dealing with drug abuse, sex education, family relationships, poverty, and race relations were seen as not receiving enough attention in the classroom. Opinion was divided on the adequacy of instruction on morality and war in today's world (Table 3).

In general, the students felt that the schools were adequately helping them to learn about different areas of work and to learn how to get along with other people (Table 4).

TABLE 3

Amount of Instruction on Various Topics

	None	Not Enough	Right Amount	Too Much
Veneral Disease	47	18	18	3
Drug Abuse	23	30	27	7
Sex Education	52	17	15	3
Morality	19	24	28	14
Family Relationship	42	20	20	4
War Today	17	26	34	9
Poverty	30	26	24	5
Race Relation	28	26	24	7

TABLE 4

Schools Helping

	Very Well	Well Enough	Not Well Enough	Not At All
Learn about jobs	18	38	23	11
Get along with others	15	39	22	13

School Problems

The students saw cheating and stealing as prevalent in the schools. Drug usage and ease of obtaining drugs at

school were seen as problems by mary students. Stealing was viewed as the one most serious problem, followed by racial problems and drug usage (Tables 5, 6, and 7).

TABLE 5

Prevalence of Particular Problems

	A Lot	Some	Very Little	None	Don't Know
Cheating	39	35	12	3	NA
Stealing	35	3½	17	4	NA
Student Drug Usage	11	26	20	5	27

TABLE 6

Most Serious Problem in School

Stealing	29
Racial	24
Drugs	16
Personal Safety	9
Alcohol	1

About one third of the students indicated some kind of racial problem in the schools, and opinion was divided as to whether the situation had improved or become worse during the past year (Tables 8 and 9).

TABLE 7

Ease of Obtaining Drugs at School

Very Easy	29
Not Too Easy	18
Very Difficult	10
Don't Know	32

TABLE 8

Harmony Between Races

Very Well	14
About Average	37
Not So Well	34
No Such Students At School	5

TABLE 9

Relations Between Races During Past Year

Improved	23
Same	39
Worse	22
No Such Students	5

The student himself was seen as most responsible for not learning. The students suggested that troublesome students be either counseled or put into more interesting classes as opposed to suspending, detaining, or ignoring them (Tables 10 and 11).

TABLE 10

Responsibility for Student Not Learning

Principal	Teachers	Parents	The Student	Other Students
3	17	6	60	3

TABLE 11

Suggested Procedures for Handling Troublesome Students

Counseled	32
Placed In More Interesting Classes	27
Ignored	13
Detained	10
Suspended	9

Trust of Adults

Most students would prefer to go to the counselor about a serious problem in their school. When discussing personal problems, more would rather do so at home than with any adult

at school. However, about one fourth of the students indicated they wouldn't feel comfortable discussing personal problems with any adult (Table 12).

TABLE 12

Trust of Adults

	Discuss Serious Problems in School	Discuss Personal Problems
Principal	11	4
Counselor	42	19
Teacher	13	8
Parent/Relative	17	35
Elected Group of Students	8	NA
No Adult	NA	24

Rules and Freedom

About half of the students felt that the schools had a sufficient number of rules and most of them (52.7%) felt that the rules were about the right level of strictness. Forty percent (40%) of the students saw the rules as too strict and 6.7% as not strict enough. The students felt that the schools were permitting an adequate amount of freedom in behavior, subject choice, and hair styles, but not clothing (Table 13).

TABLE 13

Perceived Freedom

	Clothing	Hair	Choice of Subj.	Classrm. Behavior	Lunchrm. Behavior	School Ground Behavior
Too Much	5	8	5	9	11	9
About Right	39	68	50	51	54	50
Not Enough	47	15	36	31	24	32

Conclusion

The Florida Eighth-Grade Program staff has been pleased with the results of the initial administration of the instrument and encourage other states to consider including similar instruments in their testing program.

The reaction to SOAP has been generally positive and enthusiastic. So far, no formal study has been undertaken to assess the impact of SOAP on individual schools and districts thoughout the state. However, it is felt that an impact has certainly been made and that good has resulted from it, in that schools have been sensitized to their students' "feelings". Several districts have requested and received permission to administer the instrument at other than the eighth grade level. In addition, the instrument is presently being adapted by a consortium of nine districts for use with parents and teachers.

In addition to providing descriptive information to individual schools and districts that can assist the school in self assessment, the results constitute a large data bank of the opinions and attitudes of a segment of students toward certain aspects of their school. It is hoped that this rich data base will facilitate longitudinal studies of changes in student opinions about their schools.

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Educational Testing Service. Questa. Educational Testing Service, Princeton, 1971.